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Roth, PA

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Whistling history: Ankersmit's neo-Tractarian theory of historical representation[☆]

Paul A. Roth*

Department of Philosophy, University of California-Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA, USA

Doubtless no one has written more over the last three decades on certain themes in the philosophy of history than has Frank Ankersmit. However, almost no one but Ankersmit still imagines there to be a need for a 'philosophy of history' as he conceives of it, i.e., one where 'history' names a *sui generis* form of knowledge, and so 'philosophy of history' as designating a subject matter that needs to articulate its own special principles of representation, experience, truth, meaning, and reference. Ankersmit has struggled over time to formulate a satisfactory answer, in short, to questions of his own making. Lacking has been a sustained examination of contemporary philosophy of language that actually establishes a need for a philosophy of history of the sort Ankersmit looks to provide. But Ankersmit's *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation* proposes to remedy that lack. With respect to the general issues at stake, exegetical disputes would be entirely beside the point if Ankersmit's philosophy could be cogently rationalized by just ignoring what he says about analytic philosophy of language. However, Ankersmit's philosophical rationale for his account of historical representation presupposes his particular reading. Without it, his *philosophical* defense of historicism vanishes, as does any motivation for taking seriously his project. Thus, examining the plausibility of his understanding of analytic philosophy of language becomes of decisive importance, and this review does so in some detail.

Keywords: Ankersmit; experience; holism; meaning; reference; representation; truth

Truth here is a property not of language but of the world and its things . . . The price to be paid for getting access to this deeper level is a loss of articulateness in the sense of excluding propositional truth. (Ankersmit 2012, 109)¹

But what we can't say we can't say, and we can't whistle it either. (Ramsey 1931, 238)

[☆]A version of this paper was first read at a session of the inaugural conference of the International Network for Theory of History.

*Email: paroth@ucsc.edu

1. Why a need for a ‘philosophy of history’?

Doubtless no one has written more over the last three decades on certain themes in the philosophy of history than Frank Ankersmit. However, this reflects the fact that almost no one but Ankersmit still imagines there to be a need for a ‘philosophy of history’ as he conceives of it, i.e., one where ‘history’ names a *sui generis* form of knowledge, and so ‘philosophy of history’ as designating a subject matter that needs to articulate its own special principles of representation, experience, truth, meaning, and reference. In contrast, post-positivist philosophy of science takes ‘history’ to name one variety of empirical knowledge; in this respect, ‘philosophy of history’ signals an emphasis area, and not a special genus of knowledge.² (One might also consider here Hayden White, the individual whose work has been most discussed in historiography for more than four decades, and yet someone has never had an interest in or concern with a ‘philosophy of history’ in Ankersmit’s sense.) Over time, Ankersmit has explored various ways to rationalize his claims to the distinctiveness of historical knowledge and so how to philosophically justify what he takes to be its defining features.³

Ankersmit has struggled over time to formulate a satisfactory answer, in short, to a question of his own making, namely, ‘If, then, epistemological notions such as reference, truth, and meaning will not enable us to understand historical writing and how it relates to what it is about, what alternative is left to us?’ (2001, 12). But while he has long pursued various answers to this question, what has been lacking is a sustained examination of contemporary philosophy of language that actually establishes the legitimacy of what his question assumes, and so provides a philosophical basis that sustains a claim to need a philosophy of history of the sort Ankersmit looks to provide. *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation* proposes to remedy this problem: ‘This book is meant to present a coherent exposition of what are in my view the main philosophical problems occasioned by “historical writing”’ (Ankersmit 2012, x). He does this over 12 Chapters. Chapter 1 details the notion of historicism as Ankersmit proposes to understand and defend it, and so delineates the relevant sense of what a ‘philosophy of history’ will be a philosophy of. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 – ‘Time,’ ‘Interpretation,’ and ‘Representation,’ respectively – present their argument effectively in reverse order. That is, Ankersmit maintains that an appreciation of (historical) time and (historical) interpretation, at least as applied to historical writing, presupposes historical representation. Historical narratives create, in all fundamental respects, times portrayed and available for interpretation (e.g., Ankersmit 2012, 46). These representations, it must be stressed, function to create and do not mirror a past so portrayed. Chapters 5–7 (‘Reference,’ ‘Truth,’ and ‘Meaning’) – the philosophical core of the book as Ankersmit conceives of it – then detail how his core notion of representation requires semantic analyses that contemporary analytic philosophy of language either has ignored or cannot account for. The final five chapters (‘Presence,’ ‘Experience (I),’ ‘Experience II,’

‘Subjectivity,’ ‘Politics’) develop Ankersmit’s positive conception of a philosophy of history premised on the assumption that the previous chapters have made secure its philosophical basis.

Yet philosophically knowledgeable readers will find themselves puzzled by how Ankersmit articulates and develops his key theses in *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation*. For, on the one hand, Ankersmit purveys themes that will be very familiar to those who have followed discussions in analytic philosophy about truth, meaning, and reference that relate to the likes of Quine, Davidson, and Sellars. Yet, on the other hand, informed readers will also quickly note that although Ankersmit takes himself as either disputing or moving beyond the views of Quine et al. (Ankersmit 2012, ix), he systematically fails to appreciate how his views, insofar as they have any philosophical plausibility, presuppose arguments fashioned by those aforementioned thinkers. Ironically then, where Ankersmit actually deviates from them, he neither recognizes nor comprehends the problems that result for his own position.⁴ Ankersmit compounds the irony of his supposed criticism here inasmuch as what blinds him to both the actual philosophical dependencies and shortcomings of his own positions is a form of anti-positivism that presupposes a basic commitment to bygone positivist doctrines. In particular, Ankersmit’s adamant antinaturalism enmeshes him in distinctions that prove neither philosophically tenable in their own right nor logically consistent with the philosophical theses on which his views about historical texts depend.

With respect to the general issues at stake, exegetical disputes about how to read Quine, Tarski, etc. would be entirely beside the point if Ankersmit’s position could be cogently reconstructed by just ignoring what he says about analytic philosophy of language. However, Ankersmit’s philosophical rationale for his account of historical representation requires, indeed presupposes, his particular reading. Without it, his *philosophical* defense of historicism vanishes, as does any motivation for taking seriously his question that animates his quest. Thus, examining the plausibility of his reading becomes of decisive importance, and this review does so in some detail.

According to Ankersmit (2012, 47):

my main thesis will be that there can be no historical writing outside historical representation and that grasping this fact is decisive for all historical writing and inquiry ... It is therefore imperative to carefully and thoroughly investigate historical representation ... if we wish to answer the all-important questions of how to conceive of reference, truth, and meaning in historical writing.

Ankersmit argues in this connection that ‘there can be interpretation only after there has first been a representation and therefore an either real or imaginary reality represented by the text’ (2012, 63). That is, he takes ‘interpretation only after representation’ to be a unique or defining feature of historical representation. For on this basis, he concludes: ‘as aesthetics is the philosophical subdiscipline investigating representation, the account of historical writing proposed in this book is basically aestheticist’ (Ankersmit 2012, 63). But, has Ankersmit here

identified a feature unique to and definitive of historical representation, and so a form of representation only or primarily evaluable by aesthetic criteria?

Let us follow Ankersmit above and agree, in a sense yet to be more fully developed and assessed, that interpretation logically presupposes prior representation. On this basis, Ankersmit maintains that his readers have a philosophical Hobson's choice to either choose meaning as a 'more basic' notion, or settle for defining meaning in terms of truth and reference:

In the course of my argument in these four chapters [i.e., Chs. 4–7] – which together form the central part of this book – it will become clear that meaning is more basic than reference and truth in (historical) representation ... For if it [meaning] could be defined in terms of one or both of these, truth and/or reference would necessarily be more basic than meaning. (Ankersmit 2012, 64)

Why this stark either/or of supposedly otherwise further unanalyzable notions? *Why imagine that meaning, truth, and reference come apart in this way?*

According to Ankersmit, 'pictorial representation is essentially different from description, considered from a logical point of view' (2012, 66). What makes these forms of representation 'essentially different' taken from 'a logical point of view' is holism, i.e., the interdependency of meanings that must be invoked in order to have both reference and truth. 'In both cases [pictorial and historical] reference and attribution cannot be clearly differentiated from each other' (Ankersmit 2012, 66). *On Ankersmit's account then, this holism functions to decisively separate the 'logic of historical representation' and the 'logic of true description.'* 'This [i.e., the interdependency of reference and attribution] explains why we cannot speak of the propositional truth or falsity of representations (as they are found in portraits or history books)' (Ankersmit 2012, 66). Indeed, Ankersmit boasts:

this specific notion of representation is unknown in the existing philosophy of language ... One cannot fail to be struck by the fact that the claim defended here, that descriptions do not represent, is far simpler, more straightforward, and more self-evident than the antirepresentationalism of Quine et al. (Ankersmit 2012, 67, fn. 4)

Or again: 'However, holism in history and the humanities is a holism of meaning and not of truth (as is the case with Quine's and Davidson's holism)' (Ankersmit 2011, 148, fn. 26). Ankersmit insists that the holism of historical representation not only 'logically' distinguishes it from representation in ordinary discourse, but also separates meaning from propositional truth and reference. 'Representation' thus supposedly names a feature, the one that gives 'meaning,' independently of truth and reference:

It follows that when language is used representationally – as in the case in historical writing – this use cannot satisfactorily be accounted for in terms of the existing philosophy of language, which disregards the issue of the representational use of language. (Ankersmit 2012, 86)

Ankersmit requires, then, that historical representation and meaning be specifiable as logically independent of propositional reference and truth. Otherwise, his has no logical basis for the distinctions on which he depends.

Ankersmit's notion of historical representation and his attendant accounts of meaning, truth, and reference as just outlined rest on three basic presuppositions. *First*, he maintains a principled distinction between positions labeled 'historicism' and 'scientism'; *second*, he alleges that holism of representation applies to historical writing/representation and not to natural languages (and so underwrites a principled distinction between propositional and non-propositional meaning and truth for the forms of representation involved in each case); and *third*, Ankersmit's account of representation will be exempt from the logocentric predicament (discussed below). But once holism must be understood as presupposed by all forms of representation, Ankersmit's fundamental distinction between true description and representation – 'scientism' and 'historicism' as he sometimes puts it – cannot be cogently maintained. Rather, holism is a feature that scientific theories, historical representations, and ordinary languages *presuppose* and *share* in equal degree. All of his presuppositions prove false, and with them goes any rationale that Ankersmit claims to find in analytic philosophy of language.

2. Some philosophical background

How then to characterize the core issues and debates about logics of representation as formulated by philosophers such as Quine, Sellars, and Davidson? Logic does *not* mandate what exists, but rather can illuminate the claim a statement makes – what needs to be the case for it to be true. A logic *qua* syntax neither presupposes nor dictates a particular epistemology or ontology. This is not to claim that only logic will ever be relevant to analyzing a statement, e.g., that context never matters. Formal theories of truth, in this regard, can be metaphysically trivial (because purely formal) or nontrivial (because invested in a particular metaphysics of objects). A Tarskian-style formal theory resides on the metaphysically trivial side; it provides a recipe for a semantics and demands no particular metaphysical commitments.⁵

With respect to questions about logic as a form of representation, the relevant debate can be said to begin with [Wittgenstein's \(1963\) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*](#) and to reach its culmination (for our purposes) in Quine's criticisms of Carnap and related work by Sellars, later Wittgenstein, and Davidson. But here I pick up the story with Carnap, who in the 1930s wrote knowing that there exist various, nonequivalent formalizations of logic, and so treats them as self-contained formal systems. Prior to assimilating Tarski's work, Carnap shuns as metaphysics talk of truth for formal languages ([\[1937\] 1959, 216](#)).

Tarski's work changes Carnap's view by providing a purely formal technique for making semantic (true/false) assignments in a system of logic – termed the 'object language' – by using another language, termed the 'metalanguage.' Tarskian semantics utilizes a formal recipe that precludes the possibility of

liar-type paradoxes arising in an object language. Inasmuch as rules delimit the formalism to be interpreted, these also determine for any possible string of symbols whether that string counts as grammatical for a particular logical language. A Tarskian semantics then specifies a method such that every possible grammatical string of symbols that can be constructed in the object language is assigned, relative to the model providing an interpretation, truth conditions which assure that the string is true or false, and not both.⁶ No grammatically well-formed sentence will lack a determinate truth value with respect to an adequately specified model, and the rules of interpretation guarantee that for any arbitrary well-formed sentence p , p is true iff $\sim p$ is false. Note that one specifies an interpretation for a *system* of which a sentence (a grammatical string) is a part; the interpretative operations have a recursive structure, so that a finitely specified procedure assigns truth conditions to infinitely many potential strings. Tarskian semantics does not (could not) interpret sentences one by one. For such semantic theories, 'meaning' simply ceases to be an explanatory term (as opposed to a notion to be explained).

In this context, a fundamental challenge posed by Quine, later Wittgenstein, and Davidson to others identified as belonging to the analytic tradition concerns whether or not speculation about any language, natural or formal, already presupposes using a *de facto* metalanguage, and so some prior interpretative system. Quine et al. take attributions of meaning as a will-o'-the-wisp, typically an unwitting application of interpretive models to ourselves and others. These thinkers refuse to make substantive philosophical assumptions about what people actually share when they are said to share a language.

An important parallel exists here between Quine and Davidson on translation (understood on a Tarskian model) and Gadamer's hermeneutics. For the first two named, formulations of a 'manual of translation' (to use Quine's metaphor) entails a hermeneutic circle – any assumption about what a statement is true of, or what it means, represents a projection on the part of a translator. Inevitably, all further translations build on such assumptions. As Quine infamously claims, there exists 'no fact of the matter' to translation precisely because no notion of a fact emerges until *after* an act of translation or interpretation projects it into or onto another's words and behaviors. This holds for ourselves as well as for others. All attributions of meaning and truth become then artifacts of translations.⁷ Quine never has an interest in any 'theory of meaning' because, as the arguments of 'Two Dogmas' and his many other works make explicit, he holds that no one can explain what an appeal to 'meaning' turns out to be an appeal *to*.

In sum, for those following Quine et al., issues about meaning arise based on thinking about what *natural* languages might be like as systems in light of the work of Carnap and Tarski, i.e., of languages as symbol systems that require rules of interpretation. This conception has no special tie whatsoever to positivism. It recasts debates about 'the meaning of "meaning"' into talk of relations among interpretative frameworks on the model of object languages – systems in which statements can be true or false – and metalanguages – an interpretative system

applied to object languages. As a point of logic, the distinction cannot be denied or avoided. A philosophical bone of contention remains the metaphysical status assigned to any particular metalanguage.

In this regard, Carnap imagines it possible to sharply distinguish between questions formulated within a framework and questions about which framework of investigation one should use. He famously dubs this distinction as one between internal and external questions.⁸ The important thought here involves the idea that a scientific inquirer can distinguish questions internal to the *use* of a logic of inquiry – and the logic used determines, *inter alia*, what can literally be spoken about and so what true or false statements about a subject matter can be made – and pragmatic questions regarding which framework might be best employed for a particular subject matter. The latter questions do *not* have true/false answers; truth and falsity come in only for object language statements, i.e., statements internal to a chosen language/mode of representation. This implies that one makes choices of which object and metalanguage to use. In short, Carnap's work makes vivid and precise core logical issues involved when speaking of any system as a system of representation.

Quine, Sellars, Wittgenstein, and Davidson view any such supposed ability to stand aloof from a framework and make 'free' choices of logics of inquiry as a confusion, a metaphysical myth. They all subscribe rather to a type of holism regarding language/thought, so that any distinction between the more or less basic must always be drawn from *within*, i.e., while using an existing, parochial perspective.

Consider, in this regard, the sort of example that [Sellars \(1963\)](#) employs in his celebrated critique of the notion of a 'given,' and so what in epistemology is termed 'foundationalism' – a view that holds that empirical knowledge claims must be predicated on alleged sense certainties. The example goes like this. In order to judge that one perceives a color, e.g., 'This is red,' one must, *inter alia*, know how to distinguish red from blue, green, etc. In addition, one must be aware that the 'conditions are right' for making the judgment – the light is good, etc. *One cannot separate here truth conditions and meaning; they come as part of the same package. The point is not to claim that they are identical, but to insist that to have a grip on one is to have a grip on the other.* Crucially, in order to make even a 'simple' perceptual judgment, one can only do so against a background that involves knowing a great deal else as well. The issues involve what can count as information (and about what), and how this information can enter into inferences. (Information that cannot enter into inferences remains cognitively inert, and so of no interest.) This exemplifies the doctrine of linguistic holism as understood by Quine, Sellars, and the rest.

3. Ankersmit's troubled relationship to analytic philosophy of language

Without a framework of translation/representation, the thought goes, one cannot even formulate descriptions that would qualify for a truth value. Ankersmit asserts

‘if we know what the subject term in a sentence refers to, we can determine its truth. But as we know by now, nothing can be taken for granted when we move from true description to representation’ (Ankersmit 2012, 101). But unless one cares to defend the analytic/synthetic distinction, which requires the view that single sentences have their own verification conditions, what bestows ‘meaning’ or ‘truth’ in some non-hand-waving sense of the term must be a type of metalanguage, one operating ‘in the background’ and guiding the use of a type of object language, e.g., English. Without this, no account could be given of how we *share* statements to convey information, much less what would count for purposes of communicating to others terming them ‘true.’ For Quine et al., the so-called ‘true description’ must presuppose representation in this sense, and so cannot be intelligibly contrasted with it.

Ankersmit misses the fact that the philosophers of language with whom he claims to be contrasting his position all emphasize the contingent (one might say ‘fictive’) aspect of any conception of a framework of rules and meanings as timeless and determinate. *But these arguments begin with and focus on ordinary language; the reasoning then extends to formal languages, not the other way around.* The holism advocated by Quine et al. insists on the parochialism of frameworks; logics represent inventions and after the fact impositions. Framework talk proves relative and contingent not simply by way of rejecting Kantian postulates of an a priori structure that constitutes the supposed order imposed by all human minds on experience. The fictiveness of frameworks extends in an even more deeply philosophical sense, and challenges all supposed distinctions between the empirical and the nonempirical, the constitutive and the inferred, the a priori and the a posteriori. All these distinctions, the great post-positivist thinkers in the analytic tradition insist, can only be drawn from *within* a web of existing presuppositions, ones inherited in first learning to speak and think. Reference to a supposedly determinate, necessarily shared system comes to nothing more than a wishful projection onto others of one’s prior habits of speech and thought.⁹

Quine’s key challenge to Carnap concerns precisely the sense in which Quine denies claims to be able to have a truly ‘external’ logical perspective on any form of representation. That is, Quine (2004b, 51) systematically rejects suggestions that there exists a logically neutral basis for distinguishing between frames. This judgment extends from ordinary to formal/scientific languages. Inasmuch as Ankersmit’s account of historical representation postulates a particular mode of framing, these issues and questions recur. Specifically, what logically marks off the frame of historical representation from others?

Because Ankersmit situates his account within debates in analytic philosophy of language, these questions must be answered in a way consistent with the consequences of holism for any account of a form of representation. Three points have special relevance here. First, notions of truth and reference lose any metaphysical substance; they have been reduced, for those who embrace holism, to artifacts of prior habits of speech. Second, the notion of meaning cannot function as an explanatory term. It cannot function so because literally no one can

specify what such unanalyzed appeals come to. Engaging in armchair anthropology or the like, one could declare that the *hoi polloi* mean this or that by their utterances, but surely no one can take such declarations seriously.¹⁰

Third, and for current purposes most importantly, an enduring philosophical problem concerns the fact that *rules do not self-interpret*. This has been dubbed as ‘the logocentric predicament.’¹¹ Applying a rule one way rather than another will always require appeal to additional interpretations, and so generate an infinite regress. As a consequence, no distinction between ‘frames’ of inquiry/representation can be absolute; such distinctions will need to be parasitic on one’s default frame on pain of regress. Tarskian semantics recognizes this and simply acknowledges an inherent infinite regress of languages. The ‘predicament’ – the infinite regress of rules – arises with respect to any claims regarding alleged fundamental rules or principles of representation. Put another way, any use of a form of representation always presupposes an already available interpretative scheme.

Consider now Ankersmit’s views in light of the first noted consequence of the holist turn – the context dependence of notions such as meaning, experience, reference, and truth. Ankersmit takes the unusual and unique position that holism applies to scientific languages but not ordinary languages (e.g., [Ankersmit 2012, 89](#)). No philosopher that I know of holds such a view, and for good reasons. The arguments for holism as classically presented in Quine and Sellars have their basis in ordinary language, not scientific ones. In any case, they would reject the idea that there is some sort of wall that separates a scientist’s sentences uttered as a scientist and those that she utters as a daughter, a shopper, a tourist, etc.¹² Yet Ankersmit explicitly attributes to Davidson and Quine the view that holism applies only to ‘scientific’ theories – whatever they are ([Ankersmit 2011, 148](#)). But as even the most cursory reading of Quine reveals, Quine’s attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction rejects meaning as explanatory for *natural* languages. And because he sees the concept of meaning in formal languages as parasitic on natural languages, Quine finds no help for the notion of meaning at that level either.¹³ Indeed, the view that the analytic/synthetic distinction works at the level of ordinary discourse but not for formal languages defies all logical sense. How could it be maintained for languages where the verification conditions cannot in general be specified, and fail for languages where it can? Ankersmit offers no argument, nor could he. His characterization of holism as applying just to scientific theories and not to natural languages is absurd on the face of it.

Regarding the second noted consequence of holism – rejection of meaning as an explanatory notion – Ankersmit as noted at the outset of this review explicitly takes meaning as a fundamental explanatory notion (e.g., [Ankersmit 2012, 153](#)). Ankersmit’s motivation in maintaining this completely obscure thesis resides in his desire to insist on the autonomy of historical representation. However, Ankersmit makes the unfortunate move of trying to *contrast* historicism so understood with a position he labels ‘scientism,’ i.e., that ‘only *science* can give

us reliable knowledge of objects in the world’¹⁴ (Ankersmit 2012, 3). Ankersmit italicizes the term ‘science,’ as if he takes for granted that the term marks a well-demarcated category. But it simply does not. No contemporary thinker of note actually holds this view. Indeed, for at least the last 50 years no serious philosophical defense has existed of the sort of demarcation criterion on which such a doctrine depends. Ankersmit smuggles in a vestige of classic positivism, and then proceeds to adamantly maintain that historical knowledge must be distinguished from it. But since the categories cannot be made philosophically distinct, his vigorous insistence to the contrary comes to naught.¹⁵

This connects to a further concern with Ankersmit’s general line of argument. For he takes the imagined demarcation criterion to license a separation of the methods of evaluation with regard to ontological and epistemological claims between those in ‘science’ and those in ‘history’:

However, historicism and scientism are, at bottom, ontological positions, and these cannot be assessed on the basis of epistemological considerations about the uses of evidence – unless, that is, one were to embrace the idea that epistemology determines ontology. But in that case, upholding the compatibility of history and science would rely on the premise that the mere fact that evidence is given here and now rules out any interesting epistemological between different disciplines. This assumption is sufficiently dogmatic to deserve no further discussion here. (Ankersmit 2012, 3)

By terming them ‘ontological positions,’ Ankersmit takes each as possessing seemingly autonomous methods for determining its own objects. For Ankersmit maintains that with respect to historical writing, ‘the asymmetry between history and science comes into being’ (Ankersmit 2012, 3, fn. 8; see also 11). No one, I take it, denies that practices of research and writing differ from discipline to discipline. Indeed, historians and philosophers of science have shown that incompatibilities of theory exist in the natural sciences, and yet this does not prevent overlaps and borrowing even among very different areas (see especially Galison on ‘trading zones’¹⁶). Moreover, Ankersmit’s notion of historical writing presupposes, and so cannot be an argument for insisting that there exist distinct modes for determining what there is – one ‘historicist,’ whatever that is, and one ‘scientistic,’ whatever that is. In short, it does not follow from the fact that specific disciplines may have incompatible views that one is a science and the other is not. Ankersmit’s ‘argument’ above is just a non-sequitur, and since Ankersmit then goes on to seek out accounts of meaning, truth, and reference that presuppose this distinction, his quest proves entirely quixotic from the outset.

Why conjure up from the crypt of dead distinctions the shade of a demarcation criterion? Well, it turns out that Ankersmit imagines this licenses somehow shielding off the so-called historical writing/representation from any standard that he finds inimical to his own favored mode of analysis. So while Ankersmit proclaims the failure of the ‘Anglophone intellectual world’ to come to terms with historicism, close inspection reveals that he doth protest too much.

Ankersmit yearns to keep historicism pure.¹⁷ Although Ankersmit's argument relies on this distinction, it simply cannot even begin to function as a justification for his *sui generis* view of historical writing and representation.

This leads to Ankersmit's troubled relationship to the third consequence of holism, namely, his failure to recognize the logocentric predicament. Ankersmit wants to claim that because questions of meaning, truth, or interpretation presuppose a representation and cannot be raised logically prior to it, our basis for judging a representation can only be 'aesthetic.' Just here Ankersmit needs to confront his own version of the questions that Quine puts to Carnap. From what *logical* standpoint (and Ankersmit insists throughout that he bases his account on a logical distinction) does one draw this distinction between the form of representation to be judged and the philosophical position from which judgment will be made? By what test does one determine whether one is 'judging from within' or 'judging from without'? Given that Ankersmit holds to the *sui generis* character of historical representation, these questions become crucially important for him to answer.

4. Logic and representation

Can questions about any form of representation be raised in the absence of a framework that implicitly or explicitly guides the interpretation, use, or evaluation of that framework? Carnap's distinction between the analytic and synthetic supposedly marks off questions *about* framework from intra-framework questions since the former allegedly logically bound the latter. Quine's challenge to that distinction entails the denial of the claim that any such firm boundary exists to be drawn. For Quine, to imagine frames to be walled off from one another comes to no more than a willed blindness to the interdependencies of meaning, truth, and reference in making sense of experience.

Ankersmit's claim that representation must logically precede interpretation proves to be Carnap's distinction between internal and external questions in slightly different dress:

So the truth is that the line is both really there and something we project onto the painting when we interpret it as a *vanitas*. However, we can get to this latter stage only after have first established that the line is really there in (imagined) reality, as represented by the painting. Only then can issues of interpretation arise. We might say that, curiously, aesthetics and interpretation coincide here but only after aesthetics has kindly prepared the ground for their happy reunion. (Ankersmit 2012, 51)

More generally, Ankersmit's emphatic insistence that '*the ontological status of being part of reality is, so to speak, transferred from the represented to its representation*' (Ankersmit 2012, 56, emphasis in the original), i.e., that representation must be logically prior to interpretation, signals that he inscribes Carnap's distinction into the heart of his own position.

Ankersmit clearly subscribes to holism, but imagines that somehow meaning talk can be disassociated from questions of how meaning or a form of

representation comes to have any interpretation at all. *That is, he talks 'across' or 'about' supposedly logically independent frameworks with no hint of how this could be possible on his own account.* But having reproduced Carnap's distinction to use as his own, Ankersmit then owes an explanation of what separates one framework from another. Carnap struggles with a notion of analyticity just here. Ankersmit needs some analog, some way to specify the rules of representation that belong to one system and not another. But whatever he says, he encounters the logocentric predicament. Rules of representation do not self-interpret. There must be rules, for otherwise no basis exists for saying that anything represents. Is a rule of interpretation internal to a system or about a system? If within a system, then a rule requires interpretation about how to apply it. So such a rule is circular or regress generating. If outside a system, then claims that a system of representation is *sui generis* prove self-refuting, for one must then depend on some other system of rules to guide the interpretation declared to be self-contained, basic, or fundamental.¹⁸ Any symbol system that conveys information employs a logic. It does not matter whether the system has propositional form, but the format by which it provides information and permits inferences. *No information, no inferences; no inferences, no representation.*

What goes for Ankersmit's philosophically odd remarks on meaning, reference, and truth apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to his remarks on experience. He asserts, for example:

if there is just one thing that all contemporary philosophers, of whatever denomination, agree about, it is that language determines experience, and not the other way around. The idea that experience might be prior to language was rejected by Sellars's dismissal of 'the Myth of the Given,' by Quine's attack on the two dogmas of empiricism, by Donald Davidson's holism ... (Ankersmit 2012, 214)

But this misstates the crucial point. What the aforementioned philosophers deny is the ability to characterize foundational relationships with regard to what stands as evidence for what, what ultimately authorizes belief and what does not, without having an already available criteria by which to judge or evaluate inferential relationships. The point being made by the philosophers listed in Ankersmit's quote concerns their challenges to alleged *epistemic* hierarchies predicated on supposedly fundamentally different epistemic kinds – e.g., the analytic versus the synthetic, the given versus the inferred. Their contrasting emphasis on interdependencies (holism) rejects any thought that hierarchies of certainty can be philosophically specified, *including* Ankersmit's belief that the language/experience distinction makes philosophical sense.

In this crucial respect, note that 'experience' as unconceptualized cannot enter into anyone's judgment about anything at all. How could it? On what basis would it be connected to anything else? Characterizing a perception or an experience as a color, as a sound, or as a line already, to use Sellarsian language, locates it in the space of reasons. Either experience will be mute, in terms of informing anyone about anything, or it will be conceptually freighted, in which case it no longer qualifies as unmediated. Only in the latter case can it inform.

Thus, when Ankersmit remarks that: ‘experience as understood here has no clear or direct relationship to (scientific) truth. Such events determine the matrix of how we will relate to the world – and that matrix antedates cognitive, scientific knowledge. There are no algorithms for moving from how we relate experientially (in the sense of how the word is being used here) to the world to cognitive knowledge of the world’ (Ankersmit 2012, 182),¹⁹ the question that needs answering involves how Ankersmit proposes to draw *any* connections. Ankersmit magically reaches beyond the propositional to, well, articulate all sorts of points regarding nonlinguistic experience. But how could he know that he has any of this right? One cannot make inferences about what represents without rules and evidence. Rules constitute the inference licenses by which to move from this or that ‘experience’ or whatever to some further conclusion about what there is. Otherwise, ‘experience,’ whatever he imagines that is, would be cognitively inert, incapable of informing anyone on anything.

Note in this regard that Ankersmit maintains that there exists a distinction between what a representation represents (e.g., Napoleon) and whether a representation per se, so to speak, is true or false. ‘We must clearly distinguish between statements about representations (that can be true or false) and representation (that cannot be propositionally true or false)’ (Ankersmit 2012, 69). The qualification to note here concerns ‘propositional’ truth or falsity, for it turns out that Ankersmit wants to hold fast to a notion of truth, but one divorced from any connection to *linguistic* representation. That is, Ankersmit’s notion of non-propositional representation has as its ‘goal’ nothing less than referring to ‘past reality itself,’ to ‘cross the language/world barrier’ (Ankersmit 2012, 76). Ankersmit insists that representations of the past cannot be given an ‘ontological’ interpretation, and this because representations constitute (in the sense rehearsed above) a past, and so does not stand in any ‘referring’ relation to an object (or time slice) apart from it. In addition to constituting some time slice of what it represents (e.g., the French Revolution, the Second World War), each such representation offers just an aspect of the event so referred to. As Ankersmit summarizes his view, ‘a *representation* (1) offers us the *presented*, or *aspect* (2) of a *represented reality* (3), much in the way that we may draw someone’s attention to certain features of a thing’ (Ankersmit 2012, 73). But the philosophical fly in Ankersmit’s ointment here comes in with the phrase ‘represented reality.’

Recall here Ankersmit’s insistence on separating, on the one hand, representation and meaning, and, on the other hand, propositional truth and reference. This distinction underwrites Ankersmit’s metaphysical theory of truth in terms of a relation between what he terms ‘aspects’ and their ‘representation.’ ‘Truth is here in the aspect of the world that reveals to us more of it than any of its rivals’ (Ankersmit 2012, 107). But now ask yourself – to what does ‘it’ in the preceding sentence possibly refer? The world? Seen from where? As Ankersmit flatly states, ‘I propose to define representational truth as what the world, or its objects, reveal to us in terms of its aspects’ (Ankersmit 2012, 107). But what can he possibly mean by ‘the world’ here? And in any case, since the aspects are what

an historical representation reveals, and since such representations, Ankersmit repeatedly tells us, constitute what they represent and so do not 'reflect' something independent of themselves, he appears to be invoking a comparative standard precisely where he denies that one exists. Since aspects require representations, and representations cannot be compared for accuracy, etc., there literally exists no 'it' for his statement to refer to.

Now a perhaps charitable reading of what Ankersmit would like to say here would be that a way of representing the past makes visible or opens to inspection certain previously unrepresented aspects (as, for example, Hilberg's monumental work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, turned Nazi policy in this area into an identified area of study in a way that prior works did not). Representing the past in a certain way then makes it possible to formulate certain statements about it (as Carnap would say). Here one has a clear sense in which a representation provides a frame that is logically prior to truths that can be propositionally expressed about a past so represented. But it would only be a confusion of the internal and the external here to speak of a framework as itself true (or false), or of one framework as 'truer' than another.

5. Universal history redux

The problem then is this. Ankersmit wants to say of representations, and so of reality so represented, that representations too can be true or false, but just not 'propositionally so.' What does this notion of the non-propositional truth of representations involve? By way of answering this question, it helps to make explicit another core logical inconsistency that pervades Ankersmit's account of historical representation. This relates to his putative rejection, following Louis Mink, of any notion of Universal History. Although Ankersmit must indeed deny any notion of Universal History, yet without it (or some analog) he cannot speak of some representations as non-propositionally 'more conducive' to understanding or 'truer.' But if he cannot speak of representations in this way, he cannot separate meaning, truth, and reference as he proposes.

Ankersmit cites and endorses at a number of points [Mink's \(1987\)](#) important insight that a notion of a 'Universal History' functions as an implicit and yet implausible assumption that underlies realist views of history (e.g., [Ankersmit 2012, 13–14](#)). One consequence that Mink identifies as attending the rejection of a Universal History proves particularly important here. Rejecting 'the claim that the ensemble of human events belongs to a single story' ([Mink 1987, 190](#)) results in disavowing the belief that histories can or should *aggregate*. Rather, one confronts the fact that what these various local histories:

have in common is *the impossibility of being gathered together under any rubric of 'universal history'* ... Instead of the belief that there is a single story embracing the ensemble of human events, we believe that there are many stories, not only different stories about different events, but even different stories about the same event. ([Mink 1987, 193–194](#), emphasis added)

Absent a ‘master narrative,’ no One True History lies waiting to be discovered from what the evidence provides.²⁰

In this regard, Mink makes an insightful and valuable point regarding very intelligibility of Danto’s thought experiment of the Ideal Chronicle and an Ideal Chronicle. These make the initial sense that they do because talk of an Ideal Chronicle presupposes the unity and totality that one supposedly rejects when rejecting Universal History. Danto never challenges the coherence of the notion of an approximately complete chronicle. Mink does:

But I refer to the Ideal Chronicle for a different purpose – to point out, merely, that we understand the idea of it perfectly clearly. And we could not conceive or imagine an Ideal Chronicle at all unless we already had the concept of a totality of ‘what really happened.’ We reject the possibility of a historiographical representation of this totality, but the very rejection presupposes the concept of the totality itself. It is in that presupposition that the idea of Universal History lives on. (Mink 1987, 195)

So while one may claim to reject a belief in Universal History in the sense adumbrated above, a belief in a universal historiography – the past as a determinate set of specific events – lives on in all references to ‘the past’ as a potential chronicle apart from specified narratives.

The intellectual moral here, one that Ankersmit takes himself to have endorsed and defended, is that for ‘(paradigmatically historical) notions do not presuppose unity and continuity (as in the case with the notions of person or individual) but rather creates it’ (Ankersmit 2012, 44–45; especially 45, fn. 24; see also Ankersmit 2012, 46–47). Yet having denied the intelligibility of the notion of a Universal History, Ankersmit nonetheless does not pause in later chapters to write of ‘the revelation of a truth that is intrinsic to the past itself’ (Ankersmit 2012, 118). Now either the phrase ‘the past itself’ appeals to the notion of a Universal History, a ‘past itself’ existing in a metaphysical twilight zone, or it is purely internal to the representation in question. But Ankersmit tries to have it both ways.

Consider the following sentence:

Truth as revelation situates truth in the past itself – more specifically, in an aspect of the past that is highlighted by a representation ... [This] also implies [*sic*] that it is the historian’s assignment to discover what aspects of the past will be more conducive than others to our understanding of the past. (Ankersmit 2012, 118)

In the first two occurrences of ‘the past,’ it is a past as contained in a representation. But what sense can be made of the fourth occurrence of this term? If the term refers to the representation, it is circular, and so precludes his comparative judgments.²¹ If it refers to ‘the Past’ as some metaphysical given independent of this or that representation, then Ankersmit smuggles in by a logical backdoor precisely what he claimed to throw out the front – talk of ‘the past’ independent of any representation.²²

The ongoing confusion between statements made within frameworks and statements made about frameworks turns out to be the basis for Ankersmit’s account of ‘truth as revelation.’ Ankersmit puts his view as follows. ‘But if we are willing to pay that price [i.e., exclude propositional truth], representation will

effect a self-revelation of the world to us. I emphasize the self-revealing character of this nonpropositional truth' (Ankersmit 2012, 109). Yet one literally cannot say what his truth in aspect theory relates, since he denies that one of the relata exists.²³ Yet again Ankersmit ensnares himself in the cruel jaws of the logocentric predicament. On the one hand, he wants to insist on a form of ultimate framing, one that he claims to be prior to any judgments of the truth or falsity of statements. On the other hand, he wants to stand apart from the frameworks and make statements about them, e.g., that some are 'more conducive' to understanding or reveal 'more truth.' But logic proves to be a harsh mistress. Determining what is true or not presupposes a form of representation. But one cannot say, on pain of invoking an infinite regress, that a form of representation *itself* has the property of being true or false. There exists no *logical* standpoint from which to enter such a judgment. As Ankersmit states, 'I . . . insisted throughout this book on the logical differences between statements and representations' (Ankersmit 2012, 110). Unfortunately, and all too plainly, he has missed the point of the dispute in philosophy of language regarding not only frameworks and their philosophical significance, but also the import of the most basic motivating arguments regarding the analytic/synthetic distinction, how they impact the understanding of truth and meaning, and what conclusions actually follow from taking the failure of these distinctions to philosophical heart.

The notions of non-propositional truth and experiential meaning connect then in Ankersmit's account of representation as follows. Ankersmit maintains that representation must be prior to making true statements. But this sort of holism regarding meaning, truth, and reference turns out to characterize all systems of representation, not just historical representation. Analytic philosophers of language, at least since Carnap insist on this very point. Ankersmit, however, makes the totally unjustified logical leap from a holist thesis to conclude that 'representation' and 'meanings' are somethings that can be spoken of as if separate from propositional truth and reference. This results in his speaking of 'representational truth,' as if it related one non-propositional something – a representation – to other non-propositional somethings – experiential meaning and 'the past.' *'I propose to define representational truth as what the world, or its objects, reveals to us in terms of its aspects'* (Ankersmit 2012, 107; see also the rampant conflation and confusion of framework talk vs. truth talk on page 109). But clearly, here Ankersmit can only permissibly talk about the logical framework that makes possible statements of truths or falsehoods. There is no additional 'truth' – frameworks, as noted, cannot intelligibly be termed true or false. No logical or metaphysical standpoint exists for labeling them in that way. Ankersmit's talk of 'non-linguistic representation' assumes precisely the opposite of this – that one has the elements 'representation' and 'meaning' before one has the others. *But meaning, truth, and reference come as united parts of a single package; that just is what holism maintains.*

One could not find a better example of what Ryle terms a 'category mistake' than Ankersmit on historical representation. Someone commits a 'category

mistake' when, for example, upon being shown the various colleges and buildings at Oxford the person nonetheless asks, 'But where is the university?' (Ryle 1949, 16). Ankersmit, noting the presence of propositional truth and reference, then asks 'But where is the representation?' But 'representation' and 'meaning' do not name something non-propositionally prior to and independently specifiable from propositional truth and reference; all these terms just signal the presence of an interpreted symbol system on the basis of which one can then try to intelligibly interpret various semantic notions.

It should now be plain the sense in which Ankersmit's notion of representation also assumes precisely the view of Universal History that Ankersmit claims, following Mink, to reject. For the notion of aspects, of representations that represent truly prior to being representations for knowing subjects, and the like presuppose a 'world out there' to be represented without need of interpretation. Ankersmit embraces in a singularly robust and unabashed fashion a belief in self-interpreting systems, i.e., of a 'truth that is intrinsic to the past itself' (Ankersmit 2012, 118). Again:

Representations can exist without 'I's, just as things can. There may still be representations after humanity has ceased to exist . . . Knowledge dies with the last man, whereas representations – for examples, paintings and history books – may well survive him. (Ankersmit 2011, 149)

Whether a painting to use Ankersmit's own example, represents or not, and what it represents, in his view need not (cannot?) require interpretation. Ankersmit, in short, assumes that 'representations' are self-interpreting – require no context or information about how to read from, e.g., a two-dimensional pictorial or written format to a three- or four-dimensional (including time) one. But there can only be 'freedom from interpretation,' a truth 'intrinsic to the past itself' by assuming the fixity of the relata, i.e., that they stand, however magically, in some 'representing' relationship.

This of course is *precisely* how Wittgenstein portrays the relation of propositions and the world in the *Tractatus* – one pictures the other by virtue of a self-evident, necessary form. No human intermediary, no epistemology, need ever be invoked to account for that relationship on the Tractarian view.²⁴ Wittgenstein came to see that this view would not work, indeed could not work, because of the logocentric predicament.

A fundamental arc of debate in analytic philosophy of language, in short, can be inscribed along points starting with the *Tractatus* that initially takes logic as a metaphysically fixed form of representation, and so needing no interpretation. But as it moves through Carnap to Quine, later Wittgenstein, Sellars, and Davidson, the arc bends away from any conception of forms of representation as logically insulated or self-interpreting. *All* interpretation presupposes prior representation, even the so-called 'true description.' And, on pain of regress, no form of representation can be logically insulated from others. Ankersmit promotes as

novel a view of representation long abandoned because of insuperable logical and metaphysical problems to which he remains blind.

The confusions that abound in Ankersmit's discussions of meaning, truth, experience, and reference find their root as noted at the outset in his deep-seated antinaturalism. Our historicist of the sorrowful countenance imagines himself encountering two distinct kingdoms of inquiry, historicism-land and scientism-land. Ankersmit fears that the latter will lay claim to the former, and so he sallies forth to fight to preserve what he takes to be historicism-land's special species of meaning, truth, and reference. But historicism-land exists only in the realm of Ankersmit's imagination, and so he battles only phantasms of his own making. Historical texts belong in all key philosophical respects to the same shared world that other empirical, nonfiction disciplines explore. This requires no disputing of claims that histories may, or even must, have moral or political implications and presuppositions. Historians, like natural scientists and all the rest of us, cannot avoid being products of their time. Historical texts, like other results of empirical inquiry, exist in trading zones of research and evaluation. Accepting that histories can only be products of this world not unlike others frees historians from any need to keep historicism pure.

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Notes on contributor

Paul A. Roth is a Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of California-Santa Cruz. He belongs to the editorial boards of *History of the Human Sciences* and *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, and was a member of the original editorial board of the *Journal of the Philosophy of History*. He teaches and publishes, inter alia, on the history of analytic philosophy and on problems of historical knowledge and explanation. Recent articles include; 'The Silence of the Norms: The Missing Historiography of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*' (*Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 2013), 'The Pasts' (*History & Theory*, October 2012), and 'History and the Manifest Image: Hayden White as a Philosopher of History' (*History & Theory*, February 2013).

Notes

1. Some recent works by Ankersmit on which he relies in this book have been incorporated into the review (Ankersmit 2001, 2011). All works belong to the same extended defense of his current view of historical representation.
2. For a good, general overview of issues as currently conceived by many writing in analytic philosophy of history, see Little (2012). But Little's article situates 'philosophy of history' squarely within a 'trading zone' (see discussion of this term below) with other forms of empirical knowledge.
3. For an excellent overview of the twists and turns of Ankersmit's efforts to rationalize his view of history, see Icke (2012). Regarding Ankersmit's efforts to

‘recruit’ other authors in support of his philosophical view, see, e.g., [Stanford \(1998, 233\)](#).

4. Regarding Ankersmit’s misreadings, see also [Zammito \(2005\)](#); see, in particular, his remarks on pages 159 and 171ff). For an excellent overview of Quine’s impact on contemporary post-positivist thought, see [Zammito \(2004\)](#).
5. Tarski’s formal achievement counts as anything but trivial. But a Tarski-style semantics demands no substantive philosophical commitment to any particular metaphysics of meaning or reference. Ankersmit understands none of this. For he writes, ‘the T-sentence [in Tarskian semantics] thus is, in the first place, a statement formulated in metalanguage about what makes a sentence in object language true of the world’ ([Ankersmit 2001, 291, fn. 14](#)). Ankersmit in a related article makes similar remarks: ‘Such sentences, hence sentences of the form “s is true if and only if p” are called truth theories, since they formulate empirically verifiable theories about the correct use of the truth predicate in the object-language. Obviously, one would need, in principle, such a truth theory for each sentence in the object-language’ ([Ankersmit 2011, 142](#); see generally 142–43). As discussed below, a Tarskian theory of truth applies only to an entire language – there is no place for a ‘truth theory for each sentence in an object-language.’ The Tarskian approach bypasses substantive correspondence theories in the sense attributed to these thinkers by Ankersmit. Moreover, when Ankersmit writes, ‘So all we can strive for is an ever better match of meanings of sentences in the object-language and those in the meta-language’ ([Ankersmit 2011, 143](#)), he signals his failure to comprehend the fact that there simply exists no possibility of such questions even arising in a Tarskian theory. The so-called T-sentences settle truth relative to a *model*. Models are mathematical entities that are used to provide an interpretation. Tarskian semantics does not commit one to a particular account of how names and general terms refer, or even to a particular account of what they refer to. Ankersmit’s misunderstanding fuels his systematic misreading of Quine and Davidson.
6. Naming (and so reference) in this context comes to no more than the stipulation that for any symbol representing a constant (name) in the object language, the formal interpretation maps it to an element in the domain of discourse that constitutes part of the interpretative apparatus in the metalanguage.
7. For Quine and Davidson, talk of ‘manuals of translation’ or ‘conceptual scheme’ functions as a shorthand for signaling our inevitable use of some hermeneutic assumptions. Frameworks in this sense connect every person from the start to the world; there can be no problem of having a framework and then worrying about how to apply it. Without it, there would be only a Jamesian blooming, buzzing confusion. But Ankersmit puts it the other way around: ‘Speaking more generally, in their accounts of “radical translation” and “radical interpretation” Quine and Davidson seem to make use of *two* conceptions of truth instead of just one. On the one hand, there is the conception of truth they explicitly discuss when dealing with the question of how their holism affects the relationship between word and world, but on the other their argument also presupposes the embrace of a fairly trivial and commonsensical variant of the correspondence theory of truth. One may well wonder what will be left of their theory of truth in the former sense if it is radically purged of its less illustrious rival’ ([Ankersmit 2011, 144](#)). Neither Quine nor Davidson imagines for a minute that there exists a type of relation between words and objects in virtue of which the former represent the latter, and neither ever traffics in a correspondence theory.
8. See Carnap’s classic exposition in ‘Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology’ reprinted in [Carnap \(1957\)](#).
9. As [Davidson \(1973–1974, 20\)](#) elegantly and famously puts the point: ‘It would be equally wrong to announce the glorious news that all mankind-all speakers of

language, at least-share a common scheme and ontology. For if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one.'

10. Ankersmit explicitly endorses a *hoi polloi* theory of meaning. His remarks here demonstrate once again how philosophically peculiar his understanding of holism, the central doctrine at issue in Quine, turns out to be. Ankersmit declares, 'Outside science there is little room for [holism]' (Ankersmit 2012, 89). Why? 'In daily life facts and opinions are often immune to the truth or falsity of statements on [of?] other (even quite nearby) facts. Having to change one's beliefs about one thing will ordinarily have little consequence for and resonance in the rest of one's beliefs' (Ankersmit 2012, 89). But, of course, the central point of the holism concerns the *interdependence of terms* for purposes of understanding. Nothing that Ankersmit says challenges this, and most of what he maintains supports it. Ankersmit clearly fails to grasp how his own arguments for textualism apply, *a fortiori*, to ordinary language as well.
11. For a still classic statement of this problem, see Carroll (1895). Current discussion centers on Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following and normativity, and has been heavily influenced by Kripke's (1982) work. The secondary literature here has become immense.
12. I owe this way of putting the point to Jay Peters.
13. Quine first articulates the dependency in 'Truth by Convention' (1934) and never deviates from it. Quine's view entails a rejection of just the sort of correspondence theory of truth that Ankersmit insists on attributing to Quine. Indeed, this is a by-product of the second dogma that Quine rejects.
14. Quine's (2004a, 275–6) naturalism is methodological, not ontological. 'In science itself I certainly want to include the farthest flights of physics and cosmology, as well as experimental psychology, history, and the social sciences ... Demarcation is not my purpose.' Quine's view of language results in 'a blurring of the supposed boundary between speculative metaphysics and natural science. Another effect is a shift toward pragmatism' (2004b, 31).
15. As Zammito (2005, 68f) observes, 'Ankersmit seems to have carried over too much of the now-debunked positivist image of natural science which demeaned humanistic insight.'
16. The philosopher and historian of science, Peter Galison (1997) writes of 'trading zones' to describe how various sciences, or branches within a science, borrow from one another even in the absence of any theoretical unity or even agreement. Regarding the 'disunity of science,' see Galison and Stump (1996).
17. Rorty (1982) castigates those who, like Ankersmit, find a need to 'protect' a form of inquiry by making it unique.
18. Formally, this regress problem is why there exists no upper bound, so to speak, in specifying a metalanguage – an interpretation – for any formal language. Any metalanguage can be treated in turn as an object language, and so requiring further interpretation.
19. Ankersmit's notion of historical experience portrays historians as channeling 'a reminiscence of noumenal reality and may hence reveal to us truths more profound and universal than anything that (rational) reflection on our reality can produce' (Ankersmit 2012, 170). Appeal to a mythical *Volksgeist* also manifests itself in Ankersmit's work in remarks such as the following: 'later events in the life of a civilization or a nation may provoke a partial reenactment of that primeval historical experience' (Ankersmit 2012, 128). The role of revelation likewise appears key to Ankersmit's account. 'In sum, ... representational truth is a *revelation of reality*. Not language but reality itself ignites her the light of truth, although this self-

- revelation of reality can be achieved only through representation' (Ankersmit 2012, 112). 'Reality itself?' As Icke (2012, 3) notes, 'if Ankersmit's work on experience is to located/situated anywhere at all, then it should be located *outside* history altogether, in some corner (a somewhat mystical, mythical corner) of social theory.' Again, '[O]ne could be a "true" follower of Ankersmit on this matter on the basis of the total acceptance of each of these arguably quasi-mystical propositions' (Icke 2012, 110).
20. Indeed, I endorse similar conclusions, though based on quite different readings of the material that Ankersmit discusses (Roth 2008, 2002, 2012).
 21. Just as Ankersmit speaks of some representations as 'more conducive' to understanding the past, he also terms some 'truer': 'Truth is here in the aspect of the world that reveals to us more of it than any of its rival' (Ankersmit 2012, 107). But more of what? Ankersmitian histories cannot aggregate because there nothing exists – no one past, no 'master narrative' – that would serve as a basis for aggregation or comparison.
 22. Icke quite rightly senses a gross inconsistency here with Ankersmit's own doctrines of narrative substance (2012, 54–58).
 23. 'The crucial insight here ... is that the represented only comes into being, or to be more precise, only gains its contours, thanks to its being represented by a representation' (Ankersmit 2001, 82); 'It is a matter of comparing narrative representations of the past with *each other*, not of comparing individual narrative representations with *the past itself*' (Ankersmit 2001, 96).
 24. Although almost any reading of the *Tractatus* may be contested, most would agree with the following: 'But it is fair to say that at the time when he wrote the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein pretended that epistemology had nothing to do with the foundations of logic and the theory of meaning with which he was concerned' (Anscombe 1967, 28). Ankersmit's account likewise also proves relentlessly metaphysical and devoid of epistemological considerations.

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